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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

I. Introduction

1. The present report is my second report on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). It follows my report of 18 August 2006 (S/2006/670), which focused on steps taken until that date, and measures required to consolidate the fragile cessation of hostilities. The present report provides a more comprehensive assessment of the political situation, in addition to an update on all steps taken to implement resolution 1701 (2006). I submit the former in response to paragraphs 8, 9 and 10 of the resolution.

2. In its resolution 1701 (2006), the Council sets out the following principles and elements on which a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution would be based:

(a) Full respect for the Blue Line by both Lebanon and Israel;

(b) Security arrangements to prevent the resumption of hostilities, including the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon and of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL);

(c) Full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon so that, pursuant to the Lebanese Cabinet decision of 27 July 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State;

(d) No foreign forces in Lebanon without the consent of its Government;

(e) No sales or supply of arms and related materiel to Lebanon except as authorized by its Government;

(f) Provision to the United Nations of all remaining maps of landmines in Lebanon in Israel's possession.

The Council also highlighted the delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain, including in the Shab'a Farms area, and the establishment of diplomatic relations between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon as important steps. Additional matters to be addressed include the unconditional release of the captured Israeli soldiers and the issue of the Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel.

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II. Background

A. Outcome of the war

3. As of 31 August 2006, official Lebanese figures showed that 1,187 people had died and 4,092 had been injured in Lebanon as a result of the conflict. Many of these victims were children. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that one million Lebanese were displaced between 12 July and 14 August, with some 735,000 seeking shelter within Lebanon and 230,000 outside; this included the secondary displacement of approximately 16,000 Palestinian refugees. The cessation of hostilities on 14 August triggered a massive and speedy return of internally displaced persons and refugees back to their areas of origin. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), within days of the ceasefire some 90 per cent of those displaced in Lebanon during the hostilities — around 900,000 or one quarter of the population — returned to their homes or were staying nearby. At the end of August, it was estimated that between 100,000 and 150,000 people remained internally displaced.

4. In Lebanon, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs estimates that the conflict caused physical damage amounting to $3.6 billion, including the destruction of 80 bridges, 600 km of roads, 900 factories, markets, farms and other commercial buildings, 31 airports, ports, water- and sewage-treatment plants, dams and electrical plants, and 25 fuel stations. Unemployment is currently as high as 75 per cent in some parts of the country. An estimated 15,000 homes were destroyed.

5. On the Israeli side, from 12 July until 14 August, 43 Israeli civilians and 117 Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers were killed. In addition to large numbers of people treated for shock and anxiety, 33 Israelis were wounded seriously and 68 moderately. During that time, 3,970 rockets landed in Israel, 901 of them in urban areas; 300,000 residents were displaced and more than a million were forced to live for some of the time in shelters, according to official Israeli figures.

6. Since the cessation of hostilities went into effect, the nature of the humanitarian response in Lebanon has seen a rapid transition to early recovery activities and short-term intervention to provide assistance to the large numbers of returnees. The revised United Nations flash appeal, launched in Stockholm on 31 August, has put the emphasis on the clearance of mines and unexploded ordinance, emergency health and education needs, and water and sanitation, with the vast part of project implementation to take place in the coming six weeks. As of 31 August, 30 to 50 per cent of households in conflict-affected areas remained in need of food assistance; 120,000 people in southern Beirut and 30,000 in schools and other public institutions also needed food assistance, although immediate demands have thus far been largely met.[1] Humanitarian activities were and continue

[1] Concerns also remain as to the possible impact of the shortage of some essential drugs and the effects of the interruption of general, reproductive, vaccination and child health services; a United Nations assessment of more than 400 health facilities in conflict-affected areas found that 26 per cent of all facilities were not functioning due to physical damage, lack of staff or lack of accessibility. A large number of schools were also damaged or destroyed. Initial United Nations inter-agency field assessments in the south show local communities have set schooling as a priority since without major efforts the school year will be jeopardized.

to be coordinated through clusters led by United Nations agencies and partners and delivered via humanitarian hubs (Tyre and Saida).

7. Immediately following the cessation of hostilities, the Government of Lebanon, with the full support of the United Nations system, civil society and international institutions, launched a series of preliminary needs assessments and developed a strategy to address early recovery needs, which laid the basis for longer-term reconstruction. The strategy was presented at the international donor conference held in Stockholm on 31 August, along with the United Nations revised flash appeal. More than $900 million was pledged at the meeting to support the Government's short-term efforts.[2]

8. In Israel, the existing well developed infrastructure of bomb shelters meant that displacement remained relatively limited. Many affected Israeli civilians moved southwards and were cared for by relatives or friends. As a result, the humanitarian situation has remained under control. Following the cessation of hostilities, the Government pledged to make the rehabilitation of Haifa and the north a central goal of Israel's priorities for the near future. On 20 August, the Cabinet decided to establish a special Committee for Strengthening Haifa and the North; Israel's Chief Coordinator for the Reconstruction of Public Infrastructure in the North told ministers that damaged schools would be repaired by the start of the school year on 3 September. The Government has also paid compensation to business owners and families and opened treatment centres for those suffering from shock.

B. United Nations missions to the region

9. Since the crisis in the Middle East erupted with the outbreak of hostilities between Hizbollah and Israel on 12 July, I have maintained regular contact with the Prime Ministers of Lebanon and of Israel, as well as other relevant actors and concerned parties. I have also despatched a number of high-level missions to the region.

10. Given the importance of implementing Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), I decided to visit the region myself. I attended the extraordinary ministerial-level meeting of the European Union in Brussels on 25 August, and travelled to Lebanon, Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Turkey and Spain in subsequent days, meeting Heads of State, Heads of Government, Foreign Ministers and other senior officials. In addition, I kept in close contact by telephone with those senior officials and the representatives of other concerned parties and relevant actors throughout my mission. I discerned broad support for the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and was encouraged by the general commitment to restoring security and stability across the Middle East. I am pleased to note that my efforts appear to have contributed to securing the commitments of

[2] To date, $92.3 million has been committed against the $96.5 million required under the revised Lebanon flash appeal, with an additional $13.4 million in pledges also recorded. While the initiatives under the Government of Lebanon's early recovery strategy are implemented over the next 4 to 6 months, the Government will also finalize a number of in-depth social and economic impact assessments and develop its long-term reconstruction programme on the basis of the economic and social reform agenda it had prepared before the conflict.

several troop-contributing countries to help stabilize the situation as part of UNIFIL, and to lifting the full aerial and sea blockade Israel had imposed on Lebanon.

III. Implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

A. Respect for the Blue Line

11. In paragraph 4 of its resolution 1701 (2006), the Council reiterated its strong support for full respect for the Blue Line. In paragraph 8 of the same resolution, the Council also affirmed full respect for the Blue Line as one of the principles and elements of a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution. As I have outlined in a number of reports to the Council, both sides in the past have failed to respect the Blue Line. Since it was drawn by the United Nations in 2000, the Blue Line has remained tense, with violations from both sides.

12. Since my previous report of 18 August (S/2006/670), the parties have largely complied with the cessation of hostilities. UNIFIL has, however, observed numerous minor incidents and violations in its area of operation between the Litani River and the Blue Line. These have primarily been ground violations related to the fortifying of IDF positions and the technical fence. IDF has also continued to resupply and rotate troops inside Lebanon. UNIFIL has taken particular note of daily Israeli air incursions over Lebanese air space. From the Lebanese side, shepherds have resumed their practice of crossing the Blue Line in the Shab'a farms vicinity. There has been little visible activity by Hizbollah in the UNIFIL area of operations, other than some reported attempts to salvage equipment from its previous positions and transport it northwards.

13. On the whole, the ground violations have not been of an offensive and hostile character and the parties seem determined to uphold the agreement. There was, however, one severe violation of the cessation of hostilities, when Israeli forces carried out a raid in eastern Lebanon on 19 August. The assessment that the parties seem generally determined to uphold the cessation of hostilities converges with the fact that both the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel have assured me of their commitment to fully respect the Blue Line. In order to aid the parties in honouring their obligation to respect the Blue Line in its entirety, UNIFIL intends to place visible markers on the ground along its full length.

B. Security arrangements

14. On 27 July, the Government of Lebanon decided "to extend its authority over its territory through its own legitimate armed forces, such that there will be no weapons or authority other than that of the Lebanese State". This decision provides the necessary basis for the establishment of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons between the Blue Line and the Litani River, as one of the elements of a permanent ceasefire set out in paragraph 8 of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). Both the Government of Israel and the Government of Lebanon have expressed their agreement with this principle to me. UNIFIL is now assisting the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) in taking steps towards the establishment of this area following a full withdrawal of IDF from Lebanese territory.

15. Concerning security arrangements to prevent the resumption of hostilities, the Government of Lebanon, in its Cabinet decision of 27 July, called "on the United Nations, in cooperation with the relevant parties, to undertake the necessary measures to once again put into effect the Armistice Agreement signed by Lebanon and Israel in 1949, and to ensure adherence to the provisions of that agreement, as well as to explore possible amendments to or development of the said provisions, as necessary". IDF, for its part, suggested that UNIFIL set up a tripartite body, modelled after the current tripartite coordination mechanism, to address security matters on a long-term basis. UNIFIL has asked the parties to provide more detailed suggestions in writing, on the basis of which UNIFIL will prepare a draft proposal for consideration by the Governments of Lebanon and Israel.

16. On the ground, significant progress continues to be made as regards the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces and the deployment of LAF. UNIFIL continues to coordinate a gradual IDF withdrawal from and LAF deployment into south Lebanon. Since my previous report of 18 August (S/2006/670), senior officers of IDF and LAF have met with the Force Commander of UNIFIL on six occasions to facilitate this process through the procedures and plan of withdrawal agreed in mid-August. IDF has divided the occupied area into 16 sectors and sub-sectors, and had vacated 9 of these by 7 September, with withdrawal from the others projected before the end of September 2006. In total, IDF to date has vacated approximately 65 per cent of the area it occupied when the cessation of hostilities went into effect. UNIFIL established checkpoints and carried out intensive patrolling to verify that there was no IDF presence in these locations, and LAF deployed in the vacated areas after a 24-hour period. On 31 August, LAF deployed for the first time along the eastern part of the Blue Line and has now established some permanent positions there.

17. A general understanding has been reached that IDF will completely withdraw from Lebanese territory once UNIFIL strength is increased to 5,000 troops and the Lebanese Army is ready to deploy at the full strength of 15,000 troops. According to Lebanese military authorities at the time of preparation of the present report LAF supported by UNIFIL had deployed close to 10,000 troops south of the Litani River. I expect this process to be completed in the coming weeks, which would further stabilize the situation. The blueprint for the induction of LAF in south Lebanon, as presented by the Lebanese Army Command, envisions four brigades in the areas between the Blue Line and the Litani River, and another brigade and two battalions in reserve north of the Litani River.

18. A planning and coordination mechanism has been established between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Ministry of Defence and Army Command to ensure ongoing effective cooperation on deployment and joint activities. In addition, a high-level security coordination mechanism has been created, at my behest, with the participation of, on the Lebanese side, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defence, the Minister of the Interior, the Commander of LAF, the head of the Internal Security Forces and my Personal Representative for Lebanon, as well as the UNIFIL Force Commander. LAF has also established a liaison cell in Tyre to interact with the various UNIFIL units and headquarters branches on the ground. I expect this liaison cell to co-locate with UNIFIL headquarters in Naqoura once IDF withdraws from the area.

with the Assistant Secretaries-General for Operations and Mission Support and the Military Adviser. On behalf of the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations and consistent with his political direction, the director of this cell will provide strategic military guidance and direction to the UNIFIL Force Commander. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations is at present consulting with Member States to develop the structure and size of the strategic cell, which will be funded through the UNIFIL budget. The UNIFIL Force Commander, as head of mission, will continue to exercise operational authority in the field on my behalf and to exercise operational control over the military units assigned to UNIFIL. Force Commander Alain Pellegrini will remain in office until 17 February 2007 and will then be replaced by an Italian Force Commander.

C. Disarming armed groups

29. In its resolutions 1701 (2006), the Security Council envisaged the full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of its resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon so that, pursuant to the Lebanese cabinet decision of 27 July 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State. Both the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel concur with the principle of a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution.

30. I have provided details on the status of Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias in my previous reports on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1559 (2004) and will provide a further update in my fourth semi-annual report in October 2006. I remain convinced that the disarming of Hizbollah and other militia should take place through a political process that will lead to the full restoration of the authority of the Government of Lebanon so that there will be no weapons or authority other than its own. The national dialogue has not managed so far to achieve a consensus on a political process and timeline for the full disarming of Hizbollah in the sense of an integration of its armed capacity into the Lebanese Armed Forces. I expect that the Government of Lebanon, pursuant to its decision of 27 July 2006, will define such a political process.

31. The agreement reached in the national dialogue on the issue of Palestinian militias outside Palestinian refugee camps has been recognized as a significant and important step. But its implementation within the six-month period stipulated by the national dialogue (which ended on 30 August) has not yet been realized.

D. Foreign forces

32. In resolutions 1559 (2004), the Security Council envisaged that no foreign forces should be in Lebanon without the consent of the Government as an element underpinning a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution. As I have previously reported to the host of the ability of the United Nations to ascertain if the only foreign forces currently deployed in Lebanon are either those serving under the banner of UNIFIL or IDF troops whose full withdrawal I anticipate to take place in the coming week, as UNIFIL strength reaches 15,000 troops.

E. Arms embargo

29. In paragraph 14 of its resolution 1701 (2006), the Council called on the Government of Lebanon to secure its borders and other entry points to prevent the entry into Lebanon of arms or related material without its consent. The Council has asked UNIFIL "to assist the Government of Lebanon, at its request", in its efforts to implement this provision. It further decided, in paragraph 15 of the same resolution, that all States should take the necessary measures to prevent, by their nationals or from their territories or using their flag vessels or aircraft, the sale or supply to any entity or individual in Lebanon of arms and related materiel of all types, and the provision to any entity or individual in Lebanon of any technical training or assistance related to the provision, manufacture, maintenance or use of such items, except if authorized by the Government of Lebanon or UNIFIL. The imposition of such an arms embargo is fully consistent with the Lebanese Cabinet decision of 27 July 2006 that there shall be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than that of the Lebanese State and is a measure that is inherently part of the security arrangements preventing a resumption of hostilities, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). In this context, I also note the provision of paragraph 15 of the same resolution and I urge all Member States to fully comply with it.

30. Both the Government of Lebanon and the Government of Israel are in agreement with this element underpinning a permanent ceasefire and a long-term solution. Indeed, the United Nations has devoted considerable efforts to putting in place the necessary arrangements for such an embargo.

31. I note the assurances given to me by the President of the Syrian Arab Republic that, while the Syrian Arab Republic objects to the presence of foreign troops along the Syrian Arab Republic-Lebanese border, the Syrian Arab Republic would undertake all necessary measures to implement in full paragraph 15 of resolution 1701 (2006). President Assad also told me that the Syrian Arab Republic would increase the number of border guards deployed and enhance their capacity through the provision of additional training and the supply of materiel, such as vehicles. He further said that the Syrian Arab Republic would be willing to establish liaison mechanisms with LAF, Lebanese border police and international personnel providing technical assistance to the Lebanese in order to set up an effective interdiction regime. President Assad also affirmed that the Syrian Arab Republic would be willing to establish, where possible, joint border patrols and control points with the Lebanese authorities. I have further been informed that the President has in the meantime requested the SAR military to deploy one additional battalion to the land border with Lebanon, and has indicated willingness to accept assistance from Germany.

32. The Lebanese authorities have meanwhile undertaken a variety of steps to enforce their monopoly on the control and legitimate use of force throughout Lebanon's territory. In order to enhance coordination among the concerned branches of the Lebanese security establishment, a high-level coordination mechanism has been established, as I have described above.

33. In a letter dated 5 September, the Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, General Michel Sleiman, informed Force Commander UNIFIL General Alain Pellegrini about measures taken by LAF to secure the borders and prevent

unauthorized and illegitimate entry of arms and related materials into Lebanon. He specified that some 8,000 troops had been deployed along Lebanon's land border with the Syrian Arab Republic, and that similar measures had been taken along the 200 km of the coastline in order to secure the maritime border. He also provided maps indicating the deployment of the Army in these areas. The LAF Commander invited UNIFIL, including a team of experts, to visit these positions and suggest appropriate steps for improving the efficacy of these measures through the use of modern technology and training for the troops. He also inquired whether the United Nations could assist in providing LAF with the assets and equipment that could help in accomplishing this mission. In a letter dated 6 September, the Minister of Interior and Municipalities invited UNIFIL to visit Beirut International Airport to take stock of the existing security systems and procedures as well as the enhancements to airport security that have been or are being put in place.

34. In response to these letters, Germany, on a bilateral basis, has sent a small team of experts to provide technical assistance and review the measures put in place by the Lebanese authorities, offering advice on what is needed for their improvement. UNIFIL is dispatching its own team of military, police, customs and border experts to augment these efforts.

35. The Lebanese Council of Ministers decided on 4 September to task the Army to exercise control of the Lebanese territorial waters in the context of paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1701 and, in that regard, to call on the support and technical assistance of UNIFIL. On that basis, the coordination and planning team engaged in discussions with the Lebanese military authorities and troop-contributing countries in order to define operational and coordination procedures for such maritime operations. On 6 September, in accordance with the decision of the Council of Ministers, Prime Minister Siniora wrote to me to request the assistance of the United Nations in securing Lebanon's maritime border and maritime entry points into Lebanon. He specifically asked whether UNIFIL "could provide a naval task force that would help prevent the unauthorized entry of arms or related material by sea into Lebanon, until such time that [Lebanon's] naval and security forces are able to fulfil these tasks on their own". While acknowledging that Lebanon's "current naval capabilities are too limited to effectively patrol Lebanon's 200 kilometres of coastline", the Prime Minister noted that United Nations maritime surveillance would be undertaken "in close coordination with the Lebanese Navy and armed forces". Prime Minister Siniora further wrote that it would be important that such maritime assistance "also include technical training of Lebanon's naval and other security personnel and, hopefully, the provision at a later date of marine and other equipment to upgrade Lebanon's capacity for effective and independent coastal monitoring and control".

36. In response to the request by Prime Minister Siniora, UNIFIL will establish a naval component that is projected to be in place within the coming weeks. Until all necessary arrangements are made and the UNIFIL maritime component can be deployed, interim measures have been put in place. Italy has agreed to lead an interim maritime task force on a bilateral basis with the Government of Lebanon, maintaining close coordination with UNIFIL, comprised of naval assets contributed by France, Greece, Italy and the United Kingdom on a non-reimbursable basis. At the same time, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is working on an urgent basis with Member States to plan, generate and deploy a maritime task force to UNIFIL to support the Lebanese naval and security forces. A large maritime element

presents a new challenge for a peacekeeping operation and will require a degree of flexibility, including as regards arrangements for the reimbursement of contributing Member States. It is expected that the maritime force will comprise at least four frigates forming an outer screen for maritime surveillance and interdiction operations. A screen of smaller vessels, in particular corvettes and fast patrol boats able to intercept suspect vessels, will be deployed closer inshore and operate in close cooperation with LAF.

F. Land mines and cluster bombs

37. In its resolution 1701 (2006), the Security Council envisaged that all remaining maps of landmines in Lebanon in Israel's possession be provided to the United Nations in order to enable a permanent ceasefire and long-term solution. IDF has been handing over some maps to UNIFIL as it withdraws from particular locations. The Israeli authorities have assured UNIFIL that all relevant maps of landmines and unexploded ordnance in their possession will be handed over on completion of the withdrawal.

38. I wish to emphasize the danger that unexploded ordnance represents and the harm that has been caused by such material. The extent of contamination south of the Litani River from unexploded ordnance, namely from cluster bomblets and sub-munitions, has become clearer since my last report and unexploded ordnance clearly presents a significant challenge to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). As of 8 September 2006, the United Nations Mine Action Coordination Centre, in conjunction with the Lebanese national demining office, have identified 481 individual cluster strike locations, each containing up to hundreds of individual bomblets or sub-munitions. That number is an increase of 25 per cent over the past two weeks and is expected to grow further. According to the Centre, an estimated 90 per cent of all cluster bombs were discharged between the time of the adoption of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) on 11 August and the actual cessation of hostilities on 14 August.

39. While IDF has provided some maps to UNIFIL regarding cluster strikes, they are not specific enough to be of use to operators on the ground. I expect that Israel will provide further detailed information to UNIFIL regarding the exact location, quantity and type of cluster munitions utilized during the conflict. In addition to cluster munitions, unexploded bombs, rockets, mortars and other ordnance also litter the south and areas to the north and east of Lebanon. I am sad to report that three Lebanese military engineers were killed when an unexploded bomb they were neutralizing detonated. The contamination poses a serious threat to the deployment of the Lebanese Armed Forces and the enhanced UNIFIL force whose mission is to assist them. Unexploded ordnance has been found inside UNIFIL bases, along patrol routes and in proposed locations for the expanded deployment. The humanitarian impact of these explosive remnants of war on civilians has resulted in at least 14 deaths and 57 injuries. The vast majority of these casualties have been young men and boys. In addition to the threat to human lives, unexploded ordnance poses an obstacle to the return of displaced families, access to housing and agriculture activities affecting the livelihoods of the population of southern Lebanon.

40. The United Nations Mine Action Team continues to assist the national demining office, other branches of the Government of Lebanon and United Nations

and NGO humanitarian actors to mitigate the threat. Lebanese military engineers, teams from the non-governmental organization Mines Advisory Group and teams provided through the Swedish Rescue Services Agency are on the ground clearing unexploded ordnance. In addition, under the United Nations Framework for Mine Action Planning and Rapid Response, the United Nations Mine Action Service has contracted and deployed five explosive ordnance disposal teams, five battle area clearance teams and three technical survey teams. Additional capacity in explosive ordnance disposal and battle area clearance are already planned and should be deployed in the coming weeks. These efforts have already resulted in the destruction of over 15,000 individual cluster munitions as well as hundreds of other unexploded ordnance. Unexploded ordnance awareness for returning populations has been provided by the national committee for mine risk education, supported by the United Nations Children's Fund, and unexploded ordnance safety training for aid workers and mission staff has also been provided by the United Nations Mine Action Service in Beirut and Tyre. All of this has been made possible by the enthusiastic response by donors to the mine action components of the flash appeal and early recovery proposal through the Voluntary Trust Fund for Assistance in Mine Action and bilaterally. While the response has been encouraging, more is needed in the coming months and years to ensure that the threat is fully neutralized.

41. While coordinated with the humanitarian efforts above, I would like to mention specifically the response within UNIFIL. The first reinforcements of French troops included military engineers, who along with the existing Chinese capacity have been securing UNIFIL facilities. Additional clearance capacity has been promised by troop-contributing countries and should be deployed in the coming months. As these capacities come online, they will be able to address the implicit mandate contained in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) to protect UNIFIL and other mission personnel as well as the explicit mandate to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance. Based on funding requested and capacity, it is estimated that it will take well over a year to clear the cluster bomblets.

G. Delineation of borders

42. In its resolution 1701 (2006), the Security Council emphasized the importance of the extension of the control of the Government of Lebanon over all Lebanese territory. The Council also requested me to develop proposals for the delineation of the international borders of Lebanon, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain, including by dealing with the Shab'a Farms area.

43. I have previously noted the repeated statements by representatives of the Government of the Syrian Arab Republic that the Shab'a farms area is Lebanese and not Israeli-occupied Syrian Arab Republic territory, as determined by the United Nations on the basis of the Blue Line, and my caveat that the determination by the United Nations of the status of the Shab'a Farms is without prejudice to any border delineation agreement between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon. I have previously called on both Governments to urgently take steps in keeping with international law to reach such an agreement. I have also noted Lebanon's readiness to deal with this issue and urgently called for the cooperation of the Syrian Arab Republic.

44. It is important to emphasize that the issue of the Shab'a Farms area continues to be put forward — in contradiction to the repeated resolutions of the Security Council — to justify the existence and activities of Hizbollah insofar as militant activity across the Blue Line is concerned. In light of the Syrian Arab Republic statements indicating that the Shab'a Farms area is Lebanese, clarifying the status of the area is likely to facilitate the Government of Lebanon's efforts to fully implement the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of Security Council resolutions 1559 (2004), 1680 (2006) and 1701 (2006). A permanent solution of this issue, however, remains contingent upon the delineation of the border between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon.

45. I am encouraged by my talks with the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon on this issue and note that the Lebanese remain committed to the agreement they reached in their national dialogue earlier in 2006. I also note that President Assad informed me that the Syrian Arab Republic was prepared to go ahead with the delineation of its border with Lebanon and that he was ready to meet with Prime Minister Siniora at any time to discuss all issues of common interest. I reiterate my strong expectation of speedy steps towards an agreement on the delineation of the border as an important means to help fully restore the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of Lebanon in fulfilment of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

46. In this context, I have taken careful note of an alternative path, suggested by the Government of Lebanon, to achieve progress on clarifying, in particular, the status of the Shab'a Farms. In his Seven Point Plan, Prime Minister Siniora proposed that, together with an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, agreement would be declared on a number of elements, including a commitment from the Security Council to place the Shab'a Farms area and the adjacent Kafr Shuba hills under United Nations jurisdiction until border delineation and Lebanese sovereignty over them are fully settled. Implementation of such a measure would still require the determination of the precise geographic scope of the Shab'a Farms area, which I have previously identified as an essential element to be addressed in a letter I sent to Prime Minister Siniora on 5 June 2006 regarding his question about the possible steps to be undertaken, from the perspective of the United Nations, for the sovereignty of the Shab'a Farms area to be transferred from the Syrian Arab Republic to Lebanon. I am now studying carefully the complicated cartographic, legal and political implications of such an approach and will revert to the Council in due course.

II. Establishment of diplomatic relations

47. I wish to note the assurances given to me by President Assad that the Syrian Arab Republic is prepared to establish normal diplomatic relations between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon and that he is ready to meet at any time with Prime Minister Siniora to discuss all issues of common interest. Prime Minister Siniora has informed me that he stands ready to meet with the President of the Syrian Arab Republic at any time to discuss such issues according to an agreed agenda. I reiterate my expectation of the early initiation of a process between the two countries, based on an agreed action agenda, which will eventually lead to the establishment of full diplomatic relations. President Assad informed me that he

considered this a sovereign decision, and that the details and timing must be worked out between the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon.

I. Captured soldiers and prisoners

48. The unconditional release of the captured Israeli soldiers and the issue of the Lebanese prisoners detained in Israel are both of vital importance. I have made these issues a top priority during my efforts over the past weeks. My discussions in the region, in particular with the Government of Israel, the Government of Lebanon and Lebanese Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, have impressed on me that resolution of these issues is an inherent necessity. I have also been made to understand that all relevant parties are open to a discussion of the issues at stake.

49. I also wish to note that in his Seven Point Plan, Prime Minister Siniora suggested that, together with an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire, agreement would be declared on a number of elements, including an undertaking to release the Lebanese and Israeli prisoners and detainees through the International Committee of the Red Cross.

50. I have raised humanitarian issues, in particular the release of the Israeli soldiers captured by Hizbollah, with the Governments of the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran. I have been encouraged by their support of my calls for the release of captured soldiers and prisoners.

51. I have appointed an experienced facilitator specifically tasked to address these vital issues. Because of the nature of such efforts, I am not at liberty to outline in detail how the release of the captured and of prisoners may be accomplished. I do look forward to reverting to the Council on this matter at the earliest opportunity.

J. Blockade

52. A further element that had to be addressed owing to its inherent relevance to the short term was the comprehensive aerial and maritime blockade (sea) imposed on Lebanon with the eruption of hostilities on 12 July. Throughout recent weeks, the revocation of the blockade was naturally a key interest of the Government of Lebanon, in particular given its harmful effects on the Lebanese economy. The Government of Israel had justified the blockade as a necessary measure to ensure the maintenance of the arms embargo sanctioned by the Security Council in paragraph 15 of its resolution 1701 (2006).

53. Along with the issue of captured soldiers and prisoners, I saw the goal of ending the blockade as another top priority during my efforts in recent weeks. I am pleased to report that Israel fully lifted the aerial blockade on 8 September and the maritime blockade on 7 September, after my discussions with all concerned parties led to a consensus on the necessary security arrangements to ensure sufficient and uninterrupted maintenance of the arms embargo imposed under resolution 1701 (2006). I have reported on these measures in more detail above.

54. I now look forward to the imminent deployment of the United Nations naval task force off the Lebanese coast to assist the Lebanese authorities in securing the maritime border and to replacement of the interim maritime task force currently in operation.

IV. Observations

55. Once again, part of the Middle East is emerging from the aftermath of war, destruction and crisis. A tragic 34-day conflict has thrown the region back into the instability that prevailed for decades. In its aftermath, much work must be done and much of it, sadly, must be re-done. I have spoken to the Council about how the Lebanese and Israeli peoples were brutally dragged back into war and confrontation. I reiterate the previous commitment of the United Nations to support Lebanon and the Lebanese people as they move forward. I also wish to assure the Israeli people that the United Nations is committed to their security and well-being, along with that of all other peoples in the region. Security, stability and comprehensive peace remain the overarching goals. As I have outlined in the present report, a start has been made. But many other steps are required.

56. I am pleased to note that in Lebanon itself, the Government, in reflection of a true national consensus, has decided in clear terms that there can only be one source of law, order and authority. I commend the Government and Prime Minister Seniora for their decision and their efforts. I am also greatly encouraged by the statements made to me by relevant parties, including the Syrian Arab Republic and the Islamic Republic of Iran, during my mission to the region and expect them further tangible cooperation. No State in the region or elsewhere would tolerate the existence of armed groups which challenge the State's monopoly on the legitimate use of force throughout its territory. Indeed, many of Lebanon's neighbours and other concerned actors have taken strict measures to ensure the prevalence of the State. It is my hope that they will extend their full cooperation in implementing the relevant measures, as is requested of them in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006).

57. In this context, I urge all States to channel their humanitarian assistance, economic recovery and the wider political and economic reconstruction to the Government of Lebanon. More broadly, the economic reconstruction and recovery of Lebanon will require significant sustained support and assistance from the international community.

58. While short-term measures are currently being put in place in a variety of ways to ensure that the cessation of hostilities is converted into a permanent ceasefire, a sustainable long-term solution can only be implemented on the basis of inclusive political processes, domestically in Lebanon as well as in the wider region, as recognized in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). At the same time, I wish to note that permanent respect of the Blue Line can only be expected to be sustainable if, on the Lebanese side, security arrangements are put in place to prevent the resumption of hostilities, including the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the Government of Lebanon or UNIFIL. In addition, all forces other than the regular Lebanese Armed Forces must be disarmed, as envisaged in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006). At the same time, on the Israeli side, over-flights must cease completely.

59. I welcome the troop contributions to date and the commitments by Member States to support and reinforce UNIFIL. I take special note of the willingness of the Governments of Italy and France to step forward and take leading roles, and the European commitment overall, as well as those of Asian and African Member

States. As a result of these contributions, UNIFIL will have a truly diverse character, which is evidence of the international community's deep commitment to seeing peace reign in the Middle East. A fully resourced UNIFIL is within reach and I count on Member States to rapidly honour their pledges to provide all necessary troops and equipment. I also wish to express my gratitude specifically to Spain, Germany, the United Kingdom and Jordan for their assistance to United Nations missions over the past month.

60. In order to prevent a resurgence of violence and bloodshed the underlying causes of conflict in the region must be addressed. Other crises cannot be ignored, especially in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, as they are all interlinked. Until the international community insists on a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, any one of these conflicts has the potential to erupt and engulf the entire region.

61. I will continue my efforts to pursue the full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) and other relevant resolutions and will report to the Council at regular intervals.